

Heinrich, A. (2011) Williams, Simon and Maik Hamburger, A History of German Theatre. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 27 (2). pp. 196-197. ISSN 0266-464X

Copyright © 2011 Cambridge University Press

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

The content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder(s)

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details must be given

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/73505>

Deposited on: 08 January 2013

Williams, Simon and Maik Hamburger, *A History of German Theatre*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 445pp. £65. ISBN 978-0-521-83369-1.

A new history of German theatre has long been overdue. The most recent overviews are either outdated (Hayman (1975)) or only devoted to particular issues (Haas (2003), Colvin (2003)) or both (Innes (1979), Patterson (1976), Sebald (1988)). This is all the more astonishing since the attraction and influence of the German theatre do not seem to have waned in recent years; on the contrary, dramaturgy as a theatrical practice is on the rise, and Lehmann's theory of the post-dramatic (transl. 2006) has had a significant impact worldwide – to quote just two examples of influences originating in Germany.

Hamburger and Williams also offer another more essential reason for publishing a German theatre history as – simply – “theatre in Germany matters” (p.1). The seriousness with which Germans take their theatre is astonishing, the levels of state funding breathtaking and the German system of municipal theatre provision legendary. The editors rightly state, however, that Germany was a relative late-comer in theatrical terms and until the late 18th century could not boast to have produced a German Calderón, Molière or Shakespeare. In fact, most of the performances staged were not even in German. The volume is particularly interested, therefore, in the changes around 1800 when not only theatre in German became increasingly available but also its perception underwent significant changes. Theatre came to be taken seriously, as having a “moral” function and political purpose, as something that contributed to one's *Bildung*.

The volume features contributions by some of the leading experts in the field and it breaks new ground, too, in that it offers a mix of approaches. Some contributors stick to more obvious chronologies (Simon on medieval theatre, Brandt on baroque theatre, Meech on classical theatre, Raab on post- 1945 theatre) or particular issues (Innes on the rise of the director, Hortmann on scenography, Barnett on playwriting, Condee/Irmer on spaces), whereas others choose intriguing thematic approaches (Carlson on realistic theatre and bourgeois values, Brown on the theatre of dissent, Wilmer on nationalism and its effects on the German theatre between 1790 and 2000). It is these essays in particular which arrive at fascinating conclusions. Carlson, for example, poignantly works out differences as well as points in contact between classicism and realism (pp. 92-119), Williams stresses the importance of Romanticism in the German theatre and puts this in an intriguing European context (pp.120-145), and Brown focuses on “dissent” as a crucial feature of German theatre between 1770 and 1920 (pp. 146-170). The volume is rounded up by an insightful essay on “patterns of continuity”, in which Erika Fischer-Lichte discusses “interculturalism, performance and cultural mission” as overarching themes in German theatre – relating back to many contributions in the volume which, despite the radical political and economic changes Germany underwent, stress aspects of continuity. The way in which contemporary German theatre is informed by some of these overarching themes is also illustrated in the last essay on the 2007 Berlin *Theatertreffen*. Overall, the quality of the volume overall and the individual essays is compelling and I have no doubt that it will remain the standard reference work for years to come – and deservedly so.